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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the outcomes of a study that compared 39 separate class programs for the gifted with 18 pull-out programs in the Metropolitan New York region. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students participating in the two types of talented and gifted programs during site visits to 57 schools. The results of the study indicated that the administrators in the pull-out programs originated and monitored their programs more closely than the traditional programs for the gifted. Pull-out programs were found to be better provisioned and more professional. The teachers in the pull-out programs were found to have more initial training, were encouraged to take more inservice training, and read more books and articles dealing with gifted topics. The teachers in the separate classes had more complaints than the pull-out teachers. The most serious weakness for the separate class programs was the heavy burden on the teachers constantly to devise their own curriculum above and beyond the normal course content. Pull-out programs also had a more modern structure by incorporating more screening committees, involving more parents in selection, and systematizing the selection progress to a greater extent. Furthermore, the pull-out programs were evaluated more than the separate class programs. (Contains 16 references.) (CR)

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Comparing Separate Class and Pull-Out Programs for the Gifted

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Abstract

This study compares Renzulli's paradigm of pull-out programs with the more traditional separate class programs. This study included 57 schools (39 separate class programs, 18 pull-out programs) in the Metropolitan New York region. The results of the study show that administrators in pull-out programs originate and monitor their programs more closely than traditional programs for the gifted. Pull-out programs were found to be better provisioned and more professionalized. Teachers in the pull-out programs have more initial training, are encouraged to take more inservice training, and read more books and articles dealing with gifted topics. These programs also have a more modern structure by incorporating more screening committees, involving more parents in selection, and systematizing the selection process to a greater extent. Furthermore, pull-out programs are evaluated more than the separate class programs (50% vs. 25%).

Educational Importance

The most frequently used types of programs for the gifted include: separate classes, pull-out programs, separate schools (magnet programs or schools) and within class programs (Gallagher, Weiss, Oglesby, & Thomas, 1983). Delcourt and Evans (1994) extracted qualitative descriptions of one exemplary program for each of these types. This article extends these descriptions with interview data from 57 schools. The study examines qualitative data for separate classes and pull-out programs in one region of the United States (Metropolitan New York). Educational policy makers, school personnel (teachers, gifted coordinators, principals), and researchers need information about the current status of separate class programs and pull-out programs.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are: 1. Describe the diversity for separate classes and pull-out programs; 2. Compare teachers' views and perceptions within each type of program; 3. Synthesize practical strategies used by teachers and administrators for these talented and gifted (TAG) programs; 4. Access how theoretical ideas have been modified or altered during the implementation process for these types of programs.

Perspectives

In the early 1970s Renzulli developed a new approach for the gifted. In 1976 the *Scales for Rating the Behavioral Characteristics of Superior Students* (Renzulli & Hartman) were published. These teacher recommendation scales are used to identify gifted students in different areas. In 1977 Renzulli published the *Enrichment Triad Model* that reorganized three levels of activities into a well-organized coherent program. His basic idea was to develop his program on the special education model. This work was greatly extended with the publication of the *Revolving Door Identification Model* (Renzulli, Reis & Smith, 1981). In the years that followed, a series of subsequent publications clarified and extended these initial ideas (Reis & Renzulli, 1985; Renzulli & Reis, 1991, 1997). Many of these publications are how-to books that spell out how to implement pull-out programs.

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The dominant type of gifted program that existed in 1977 involved placing all the gifted students at each grade in separate classes. These students stayed together throughout the day. In the New York region this alternative still dominates as the most popular type of program for the gifted. For the purpose of this study we label this type of program as the traditional approach. This alternative is an outgrowth of ability grouping and was developed early in the 20th century.

Renzulli's ideas, coupled with the innovative implementation efforts of Reis and others, have formed a new paradigm in this area; therefore, this study contrasts Renzulli's paradigm with the traditional approach. How do the newer pull-out programs compare with the more traditional separate class approach in terms of: 1. program qualities; 2. identification approaches; 3. staff development; 4. evaluation? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach? How do teachers implement important elements of each type of program?

Methods

Site visits were made to each of the 57 schools. During these visits interviews were conducted with teachers and students participating in the two types of TAG programs. The interview guides followed a structured format but were organized to encourage open-ended comments and discussions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Rist, 1982a, 1982b). The topics used in the interviews were extracted from Orenstein's (1984) study of effective TAG programs. Each interview was audiotaped, transcribed, computerized, and sorted.

The interviews were organized within four areas: programs (questions dealing with curriculum, organization, supplies, grouping); identification (questions involving definitions, the mechanism for identifying gifted students, the stakeholders used in the identification process, characteristics of the students selected); staff (questions concerning the experience and training of teachers, their approaches to maintaining and enhancing their skills, how teachers are selected, how they were supervised); evaluation (questions concentrating on whether the program had been evaluated, if follow-up activities of students had been undertaken, strengths and weaknesses of the program, and the participants evaluation of the program).

The teacher interviews took two hours to conduct and were supplemented by any available descriptive information that had been developed by each school. The student interviews took one hour to complete and were used to verify the accuracy of the teachers' information.

The factual portions of the data are reported using descriptive indices. The triangulation of methods for this study include the content analysis of documents together with interviews of participants at two levels (teachers, students); therefore, we were able to examine the accuracy of each respondent's answers with other participants in the program. This process assures a measure of reliability and validity.

Data Sources

This study collected data from the gifted programs in 57 schools (39 separate class programs, 18 pull-out programs) in the Metropolitan New York region.

Results

The New York region is geographically close to the University of Connecticut (Renzulli's academic affiliation) and our site visits revealed that Renzulli had conducted numerous workshops in these schools. During our visits the teachers were seen to have many of the Renzulli and Reis publications. We concluded that the combination of inservice training and the availability of resource material were sufficient for accurate implementation of the paradigm.

Programs

For the analyses that follow we compare the percentages for the two types of programs. The first percentage is for the separate class programs, and the second percentage is for the pull-out

programs. We found important differences in several areas. More administrators originate pull-out programs than separate class programs (61% vs. 73%). They also maintain authority over the program more often (59% vs. 79%). The pull-out programs have more supplies (50% vs. 73%) and more teachers in such programs have budgets (23% vs. 67%) and make budget decisions (10% vs. 18%).

The Renzulli paradigm has its own definition for giftedness (the intersection of above average ability, task commitment, creativity), and most of the teachers in the pull-out programs liked this definition. But this did not prevent them from empirically developing their own definitions of the term. The teachers in the separate classes have more diversity in their definitions of giftedness and they are often at odds with the definitions used by their district. Some found the district definition is too narrow. They believe that more students could be admitted into the program. Other teachers find fault with the way the district defines the term. They object to the instruments used and the levels of acceptance.

One very important difference is that more children are able to follow their own interests in the pull-out programs (79% vs. 93%). This finding shows that the use of Type III activities are being used extensively. Type III activities (individualized or small group investigations) are designed to permit the gifted to do real investigations in an area of their own choosing.

In terms of curriculum the separate class programs, by and large, are bound by the mandated syllabi of their district. In the high schools this means preparing for the New York State Regents exams. In many cases the teachers enhanced this curriculum by adding activities they have developed themselves. This curriculum development is seen as a major problem for the teachers in the separate programs.

This is not the case for the pull-out programs. At the secondary level the programs have the same constraints (students are required to take Regents exams), but they still use Type III activities to supplement the curriculum. At the elementary level many schools use Type II activities (training materials for values, cognitive skills etc.) that involve critical thinking, problem solving, deductive logic, etc. One school uses the Talents Unlimited materials as a Type II set of activities. Other elementary schools use Type I activities (activities designed for breath -- to widen interests) to enhance the curriculum. The teachers in these programs are resource room teachers and concentrate on helping the students to develop their own Type III projects. This individualized Type III curriculum is the responsibility of the students themselves, not the teacher.

When qualitatively analyzing the teachers' responses, it is evident that there are differences between separate classes in elementary schools and those in junior or senior high schools. The elementary schools programs encourage the gifted to follow their own interests. At some elementary schools learning centers were used to stimulate the children to follow their interests. At the secondary level the students can follow their their own initiative in the form of Westinghouse-type research projects. Some high schools use clubs or after school classes or classes outside the school. The pull-out schools at both levels use Type III activities so there is no difference in encouraging the students to follow their own interests.

Identification

The identification process is an important area for analysis because lax procedures at this stage can dilute the talent enrolled in the program. Weak, disorganized procedures can compromise the integrity of the program and undermine its effectiveness.

Pull-out programs have more systematized identification procedures. For example, more pull-out programs use screening committees (31% vs. 85%) and systematized the identification processes to a grater extent (22% vs. 55%). Pull-out programs also include more guidance personnel (34% vs. 54%), more administrators (67% vs. 93%), and more parents (42% vs. 64%) on the screening committees. Furthermore, the pull-out programs use a more systematized appeals process when children are rejected from admission. The Renzulli paradigm suggests the formation of a talent pool reaching 20-25% of the school. Consequently, pull-out programs have many more students enrolled. This usually means that more racial and ethnic diversity can be found. Despite

these safeguards teachers in the pull-out programs complain about students they consider as nongifted.

The separate class programs typically enroll only 3-5% of the school (one school uses 10%). This puts much more pressure on the selection process. Therefore, we are not surprised that teachers in the separate programs are more vocal about nongifted being inserted into their program. We conclude that nongifted students are a much bigger problem for the separate class programs. Some teachers complain very forcefully about affirmative action problems where racial or ethnic minorities are admitted. Other teachers complain about internal school politics being used in the selection process. With the small number of students being served, it stands to reason that this problem will get worse in the future.

The interview data reveal many more differences between the two types of programs regarding the identification process. The pull-out programs, for the most part, use multiple criteria in the selection process. With more administrators and guidance personnel involved on the screening committees there is evidence that a wide variety of standardized tests are used. Most schools use standardized test scores and grades as criteria. Some pull-out schools use IQ tests as one of their instruments. Several teachers referred to the use of a matrix in selection (we infer that the Baldwin Matrix was adapted). The matrix is a simplified way of transforming a number of different tests and scales into the same metric. Most pull-out programs use the teacher recommendation forms developed by Renzulli, but the New York City schools make adaptations to these scales either by eliminating items or discarding specific scales. Their modified scales are easier to use and are clever ways to avoid purchasing the scales each year. However, we wonder if these adaptations violate the validity of these instruments.

The separate class programs also use a number of different IQ tests and standardized instruments in their selection process. Some schools rely only on IQ tests for selection and set limits above 130 or 140. Other schools use both IQ tests together with standardized test scores. (It should be mentioned that IQ tests cannot be used in the New York City public schools without securing permission from the parents.) The separate class programs in high schools also use Regents scores. A few schools use teacher recommendations for admission to kindergarten or primary school programs. The obvious reason that the separate class programs rely on IQ tests and other standardized test scores is to isolate the top 3-10% of the school and to avoid challenges from students not selected. These tests can be defended with authority. In conclusion, both types of programs are adept at using standardized tests.

Staff

The heart and soul of any gifted program are the teachers (Campbell, 1985). Consequently, the degree of staff development and training are vital topics to analyze. The pull-out teachers had more initial training (60% vs. 78%) to prepare them for teaching the gifted, and their schools put more emphasis on inservice training (53% vs. 80%). High percentages of teachers in both types of programs read books and articles about the gifted (78%), however, pull-out teachers regularly read more professional periodicals (57% vs. 81%).

Complaints

The teachers in the separate classes have many more complaints than the pull-out teachers. The most serious weakness we uncovered for the separate class programs was the heavy burden on the teachers to constantly devise their own curriculum above and beyond the normal course content. Some teachers are able to solve this problem by developing their own philosophy. We believe that this process would be beneficial to other teachers in separate class programs, but we wonder how many could accomplish such a feat under the time constraints imposed in most schools.

Many separate class teachers complain about the lack of guidelines and the lack of organization in their programs. They want to set limits. They also demand much better

coordination with other teachers. Most of them feel very much alone without the opportunity to communicate regularly with other teachers in the program.

Many of these teachers want more inservice training. Some want training in small group work; others need help in finding and adapting curricula. Finally, others complaine about school bureaucracy and the unnecessary intrusion of politics into their program.

The major complaints for the pull-out teachers concern their use of time and their relationships with the regular teachers in the school. Time is their biggest problem because it effects every aspect of their teaching. We list three examples that illustrate these problems. One teacher told us "...by the time you pick them up, set up class, there is never enough time." Another teacher said that pull-out students do not receive enough time for their Type III projects -- by the time they start making progress, time is up. Another complained about the lack of enough time to do her Type II activities. These examples show the different dimensions of the time problem for the pull-out teachers.

The most serious complaints involve the pull-out teachers' relationships with the regular teachers. They told us that the teachers in the regular classes resent the best students being pulled out. When students are pulled out for band, remedial work, special education, as well as the gifted class the whole process becomes a "hassle." Many of the pull-out gifted students say their teachers are angry with them. Some reported missing important lessons that they did not made up. One regular teacher told the pull-out teacher that the removal of her best students "took the spark out of my lessons." She felt that she could not get the other students to extract the meaning and depth of her lessons. Almost all the pull-out teachers have similar stories about regular teachers. Some involve the need to do more Type I or Type II activities. In any event, the lack of coordination among the pull-out teachers and the regular teachers emerges as a major unresolved problem.

Evaluation

More pull-out programs were evaluated than separate class programs (25% vs. 50%). The teachers in separate classes believe that their pupils work harder (93% vs. 83%) and maintain contact more often with students from former years (78% vs. 67%). Perhaps the reason for this finding is that separate class teachers spend much more time with their students than the resource room pull-out teachers. Finally, the teachers of the separate classes report more contact with parents and this might also be due to the greater amounts of time that the teachers spend with the gifted children. This prelonged contact with the gifted might also be responsible for the separate class teachers being accused of elitism more often (43% vs. 25%).

Discussion

The Renzulli pull-out paradigm was compared with the more traditional separate classes approach. There are major differences with the two approaches. The pull-out program identifies 20% of the students in the school as gifted and is therefore more broadly based. By contrast, the separate class program usually isolates only 3-10% of the students in a school as gifted. There are major differences in the organization of the two approaches with the separate class programs being more unstructured. The two approaches use approximately the same number of teachers.

On the basis of the design of the two types of programs, it is expected that the pull-out programs should be less elitist in nature because so many more students are involved. Our study shows this to be true as far as the teachers are concerned. With the many students that are pulled out for band, music lessons, special education, and remediation it is likely that the gifted who are pulled out just become one of many and not the "elite."

A similar prediction can be made for the socialization of the exceptional child with his or her less gifted peers. In the pull-out programs the gifted child remains in the regular class and therefore must socialize with less gifted peers. In the separate class programs the gifted child spends most of their day with other gifted children and becomes isolated from more normal children. In our study only teachers in the separate classes talk about these socialization problems.

Another prediction that can be made from the design of the two programs is that the average principal will be attracted to the pull-out programs because she can accept so many more students. This makes for more racial or ethnic equity and would appeal to egalitarian motives. In such a program the principal can send acceptance letters to 20% of the parents in the school. Many principals see this approach as a way of strengthening their base of support.

Our study uncoveres some problems that call for solutions. In the pull-out programs the conflicts among TAG and regular teachers can be a major problem because they effect the overall morale of the teaching staff. If the regular teachers become unsupportive of the program, they can undermine its effectiveness. For example, they can hold back or become passive in identifying Type III problems. They can resist or refuse to complete teacher recommendation forms that are instrumental in identifying the gifted. Both forms of noncooperation can hurt the program.

Another important problem with pull-out and separate class programs is that administrators and teachers are very reluctant to remove students who are not performing up to their ability. In the pull-out programs some children do not have any task commitment and refuse to do any Type III projects. Renzulli advocates removing such children from the program, but school politics makes this option less viable. It is our guess that principals do not want to send home negative letters and possibly make enemies of some parents.

However, the bottom line for judging the effectiveness of any paradigm for the gifted is whether the program maximizes the development of the children's talent. Without any follow-up procedures being used in either program, it is unlikely that this question can be answered.

Finally, paradigms in the sciences have evolved over the centuries. Most of them last a few generations and are replaced by more sophisticated ones. It is our view that these two paradigms should be viewed as way stations along a path of development. In our judgment the research community in this area has been too complacent and smug over the years. What is needed are new paradigms that stand on the shoulders of the old paradigms. Maximizing talent should be a high priority for any society.

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